



Designing Emotionally Intentional and Socially Grounded Instagram Experiences

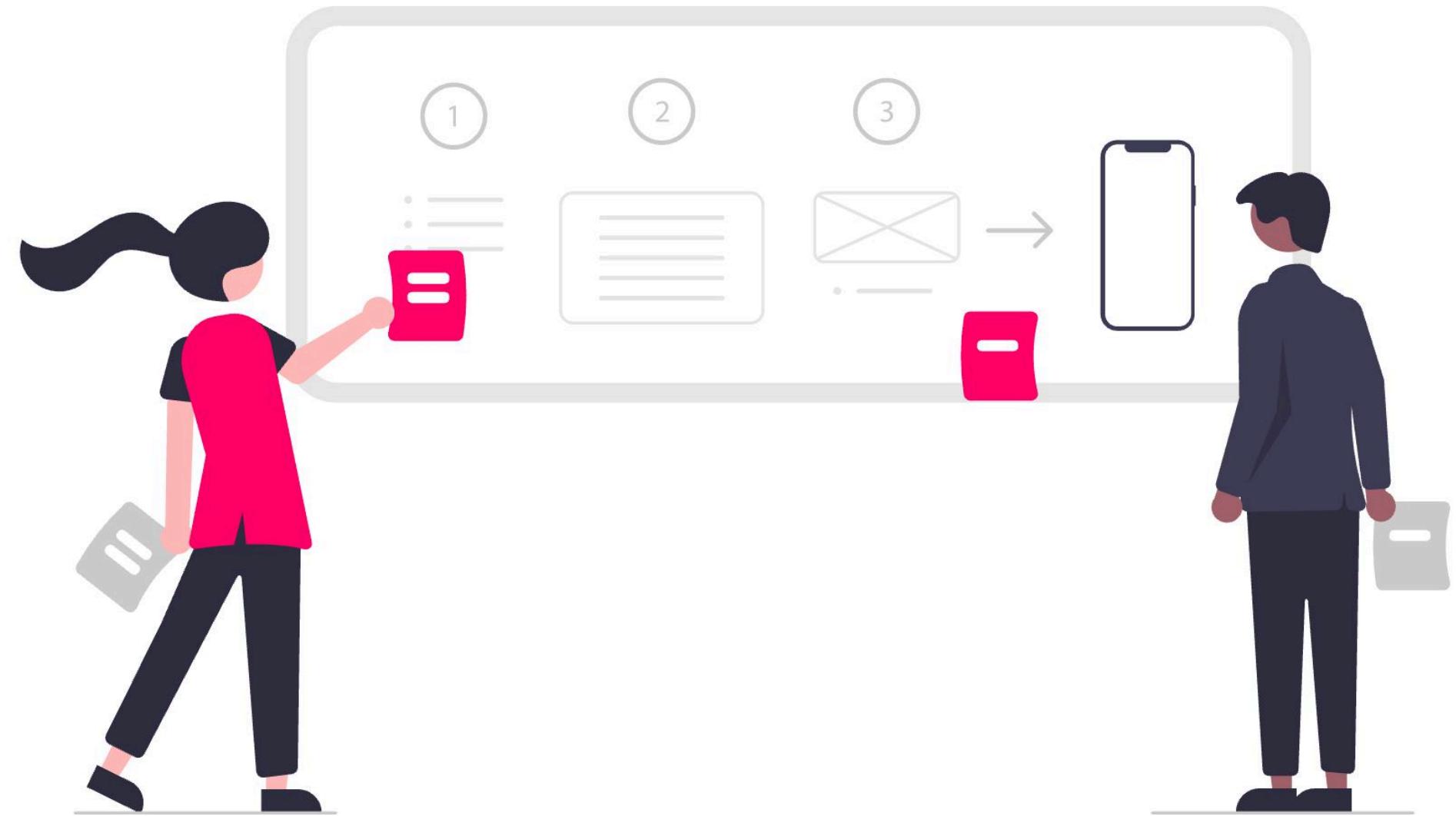
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Problem Statement

Use of Instagram can have emotional impact that transcends the digital space into real life experiences and relationships. Unintentional use, which is the majority of Instagram use, can lead to negative emotional consequences.



1. Think Aloud
2. Directed Storytelling
3. Survey
4. Storyboards + Speed Dating
5. Low-Fidelity Prototyping

Methods

Participants

- **N = 18**
- 13 students, 1 faculty member, 4 non-student adults
- 11 female, 7 male
- All were **users of Instagram** or similar social media applications
- Recruited through the researcher's **personal social network**
- In-person and remote



Types of Data

- 1. Observer notes through participant...**
 - a. Observation**
 - b. Interaction**
 - c. Verbal responses**
 - d. Storytelling**
 - e. Reactions**
- 2. Survey responses**
- 3. Photos of participants' Instagram feeds**

Methods of Analysis

- 1. Generalizing insights**
- 2. Affinity diagramming**
- 3. Walking the wall**
- 4. Problem reframing**
- 5. Quantitative analysis**

Evidence

Quotes

"I like watching TV show clips and I would watch them if they're interesting and I haven't seen them before, but after I watch them I feel like I just wasted a minute of my time." (Prototype)

"Actually, I would be pretty interested in this [iPhone 17 ad] because I want to see if there are any new innovative developments or features." (Prototype)

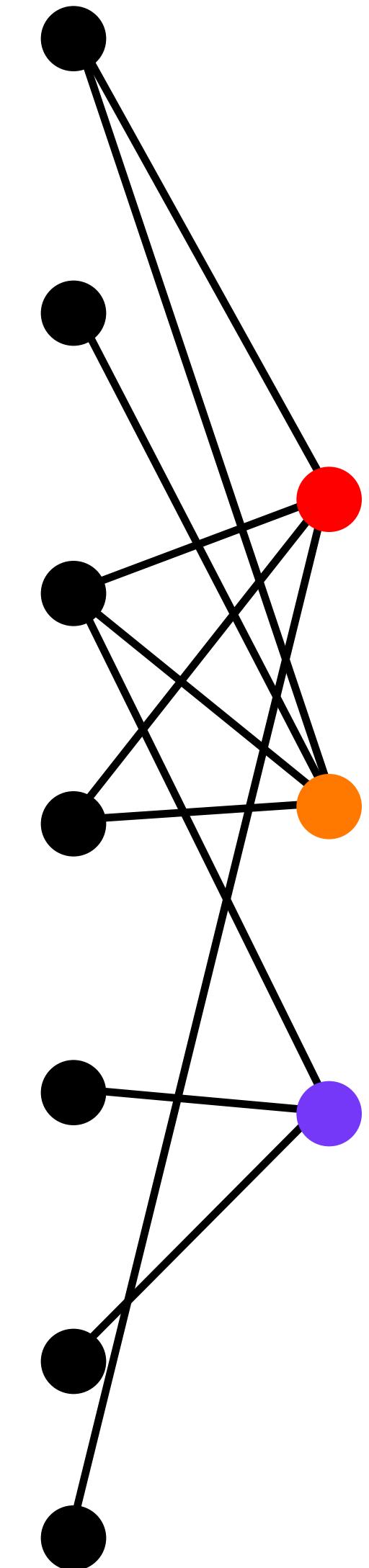
"I felt negative emotions using Instagram when I found out I was blocked by my ex." (Directed Storytelling)

[How do you feel after using Instagram?] "Disgust, apathy, and disappointment." (Directed Storytelling)

"As an international student, it's difficult for me to use a phone number while traveling, so I use Instagram to DM people." (Directed Storytelling)

"I feel much closer to my friends through using Instagram." (Directed Storytelling)

[What prompts you to use Instagram?] "Boredom" x4(Survey)



Insights

Instagram use is often unintentional and leads to negative emotional outcomes.

Users have complex, mixed feelings about content

Instagram affects real emotions tied to relationships, not just content consumption.

Use of Instagram can have emotional impact that transcends the digital space into real life experiences and relationships. Unintentional use, which is the majority of Instagram use, can lead to negative emotional consequences.

Insight #1

Instagram use is often unintentional and leads to negative emotional outcomes.

Insight #2

Users have complex, mixed feelings about content.

Insight #3

Instagram affects real emotions tied to relationships, not just content consumption.

Implications

Intentionality

Users need support to make their Instagram use more intentional.

Emotional Nuances

Instagram needs to better capture and respond to nuanced emotional reactions.

Social Connection

Features should support increased connection.

Design Directions

1. More emotionally intentional Instagram use

- Future design should help users become aware of how different types of content make them feel and allow them to choose experiences that support their desired emotional state

2. Richer emotional expression and filtering

- Instagram should expand beyond likes and saves to support more nuanced emotional reactions, enabling users to label, understand, and filter content

3. Socially grounded, emotionally supportive experiences

- Design should shift toward features that strengthen positive social connections, such as friend-curated recommendations, while reducing emotionally harmful or isolating interactions

1. Emotional Reactions and Filters

- Users can react to content with a wider **range of emotions**.
- Users can view content that is filtered by **desired emotional experiences**.
- Supports **intentional engagement** and **reduces negative emotional outcomes** from unintentional scrolling.

2. Friend-Recommended Feed

- A separate feed composed only of posts that friends want to share with the user.
- Encourages **positive and trustworthy** content.
- **Strengthens emotional connections** and **reduces exposure** to content that may trigger negative feelings.

Prototyped Features

Reflection: Future Direction

If I were to continue this project as an independent study, I would explore personalized, adaptive social media interfaces that learn from a user's reactions and preferences over time, offering more emotionally-situated content curation and interfaces corresponding to a user's most comfortable aesthetic environment.

Thank You

